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ABSTRACT

Since the number of students taking advantage of Roane State Community College's policy of allowing withdrawal from courses ("W" grade) up to the last day of class has increased from 14 percent of all grades given in fall 1972 to 23 percent of all grades given in fall 1974, an effort was made to determine some of the factors involved in the "withdrawal syndrome." All students who dropped one or more classes during spring quarter 1974 were requested to complete a special form which listed 15 possible reasons for withdrawal. The one reason chosen most often (28 percent) seemed to be scheduling conflicts with work, other classes, or other duties. The second ranking category included a series of academic reasons; 19 percent said they were making less than a passing grade. The third major reason was the cancellation or splitting of classes. The distribution of withdrawals over the quarter was skewed at the extremes, with 78 percent of all drops occurring during either the first or last weeks. The data indicated that the grade "W" is probably not misused by the students nor reserved only to the failing student. (Author/MJK)

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A STUDY OF THE "WITHDRAWAL SYNDROME"

AT RSCC

Office of Institutional Research

January, 1975

ROANE STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

HARRIMAN, TENNESSEE

JC 750 027

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Several people at RSCC have expressed an interest in the reasons for students withdrawing from classes or from school. Their interest is justified by the fact that an increasing percentage of students are using the "W" or withdrawal grade, which can be requested up until the last day of class. For example, the incidence of "W" grades has increased from 14% of all grades given in Fall, 1972 to 16% in Fall, 1973 to 23% in Fall, 1974. The percentage of "W" grades given during academic 1973-74 was 16% (Fall), 19% (Winter), 20% (Spring), and 16% (Summer). While about one-third of these grades come from a student dropping a single class, many of them represent multiple drops. The percentage of credit headcount students dropping two or more courses has increased from 13% in Fall '73 to 23% in Fall '74, while the percentage dropping three or more classes has risen from 7% to 11% in the same period, and the percentage dropping four or more has risen from 4% to 6% during that time.

In an effort to determine some of the factors involved in this data, all students who dropped one or more classes during Spring quarter, 1974 were requested to complete a Withdrawal Form (shown below) which was attached to the required Change of Registration form.

WITHDRAWAL FORM

If you are dropping one or more courses or are withdrawing from RSCC, please complete this form. The information provided will enable Roane State to improve its programs and activities.

Last Name First Middle _____ Mailing Address _____ S.S.# _____ Date _____

Parent's Address (if different from above) _____ Names and section # of courses dropped _____

REASON(S) FOR WITHDRAWAL: (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

____a. I am making less than a passing grade in these courses.
____b. I was misadvised into these courses.
____c. I have decided to change programs and don't need these courses.
____d. There is a schedule conflict with employment or other duties.
____e. My family is moving out of the area.
____f. I have inadequate finances to continue.
____g. A medical or health problem is the reason.
____h. I am emotionally and psychologically unable to continue.
____i. I have to fulfill a military obligation.
____j. I am dissatisfied with the instruction.
____k. I am dissatisfied with the counseling process.
____l. I am leaving for disciplinary reasons.
____m. I am dissatisfied with the course content.
____n. I lacked the necessary background for these courses.
____o. The college canceled the course.
____p. Other (please specify) _____

Do you have any specific plans for your life at this point? Are there any comments you'd like to make?

The method proved to be fairly accurate, in that 97% of the students dropping classes completed at least a partial Withdrawal Form. Only 62% of the courses dropped were represented on the forms, however.

The distribution of reasons given for dropping the classes was as follows:

#2	112 (19%)	a.	I am making less than a passing grade in these courses.
	27 (4%)	b.	I was misadvised into these courses.
	43 (7%)	c.	I have decided to change programs and don't need these courses.
#1	170 (28%)	d.	There is a schedule conflict with employment or other duties.
	5 (1%)	e.	My family is moving out of the area.
	7 (1%)	f.	I have inadequate finances to continue.
	14 (2%)	g.	A medical or health problem is the reason.
	16 (3%)	h.	I am emotionally and psychologically unable to continue.
	1 (0%)	i.	I have to fulfill a military obligation.
	28 (5%)	j.	I am dissatisfied with the instruction.
	2 (0%)	k.	I am dissatisfied with the counseling process.
	0 (0%)	l.	I am leaving for disciplinary reasons.
	22 (4%)	m.	I am dissatisfied with the course content.
	30 (5%)	n.	I lacked the necessary background for these courses.
#3	74 (12%)	o.	The college canceled the course.
	52 (9%)	p.	Other (please specify)_____

The single most important reason for dropping classes seemed to be conflicts with work, other classes, or other duties. It may be significant to note that the Student Attrition Study done last year uncovered this same factor as the primary reason for withdrawing from RSCC. This fact substantiates the usefulness of the present withdrawal policy, in that these conflicts could occur at any time during a quarter. The second ranking category included a series of grade-related reasons, such as a lack of time to devote to the course, necessity of missing several classes, etc. The third most important reason included those classes either canceled or split by the college, necessitating a series of withdrawals. In fact, 43% of these responses were the direct result of two classes being split. The fourth-ranking category included a series of "other" responses, such as:

- computer mistake
- Admissions Office error
- instructor requested I drop
- had to repeat prerequisite first
- changed mind after preregistration
- personal reasons
- couldn't get to class on time because of P.E. class beforehand

The rest of the responses were scattered among a variety of reasons. Contrary to what might be expected, most classes were dropped for reasons other than academic or grade-related ones.

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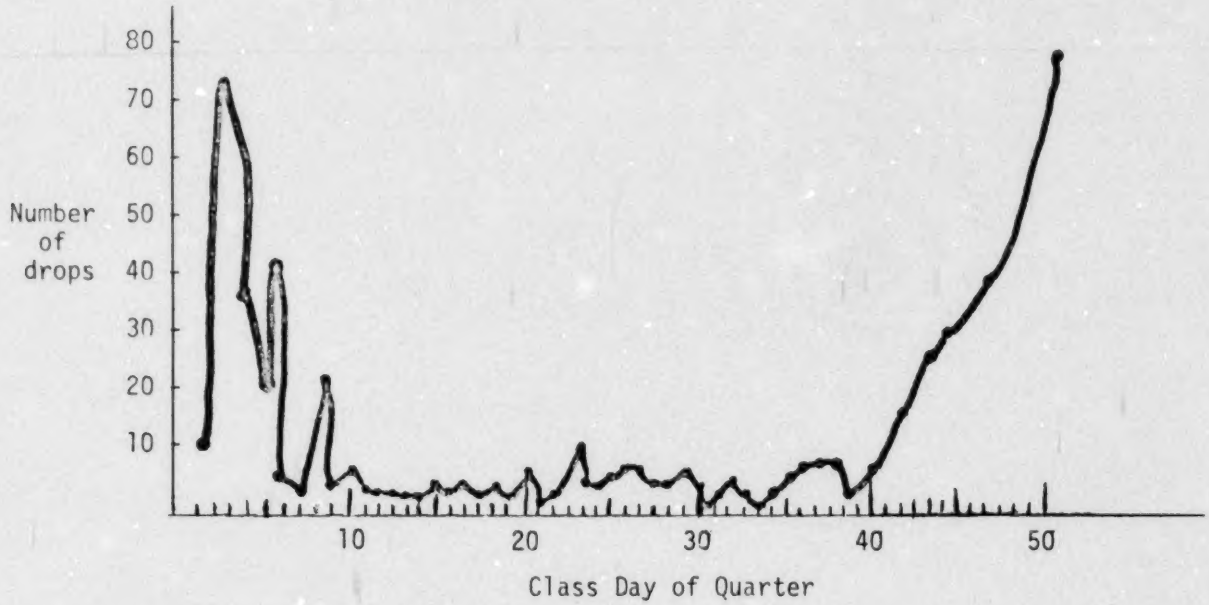
An analysis of the drops by class day of the quarter shows the following distribution.



The distribution is, as expected, skewed at the extemes, with 78% of all drops occurring during either the first or last week of school. It seems likely that if the Drop Date were moved back into the quarter, the result would be an earlier but smaller peak, followed by more "D" and "F" grades given.

About two-thirds (67%) of the students dropping classes only dropped a single course, while 23% dropped two and 10% dropped three or more classes during the quarter. About 44% of all the students at RSCC dropped at least one class during Spring quarter, indicating the widespread usage of the "W" grade.

Summer '74

The Withdrawal Form was also used during the Summer quarter, 1974. The incidence of "W" grades dropped from 20% of all grades in the Spring to 16% in the summer. A total of 146 students (33% of enrollment) dropped one or more classes, which was also a reduction from the 44% in the Spring. The reasons given for withdrawing were as follows:

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#3	22 (13%)	a.	I am making less than a passing grade in these courses.
	6 (3%)	b.	I was misadvised into these courses.
#4	18 (10%)	c.	I have decided to change programs and don't need these courses.
#2	34 (20%)	d.	There is a schedule conflict with employment or other duties.
	0 (0%)	e.	My family is moving out of the area.
	21 (1%)	f.	I have inadequate finances to continue.
	10 (6%)	g.	A medical or health problem is the reason.
	3 (2%)	h.	I am emotionally and psychologically unable to continue.
	0 (0%)	i.	I have to fulfill a military obligation.
	3 (2%)	j.	I am dissatisfied with the instruction.
	0 (0%)	k.	I am dissatisfied with the counseling process.
	0 (0%)	l.	I am leaving for disciplinary reasons.
	2 (1%)	m.	I am dissatisfied with the course content.
	12 (7%)	n.	I lacked the necessary background for these courses.
#1	48 (28%)	o.	The college canceled the course.
	14 (8%)	p.	Other (please specify)_____

The ranking for summer school was somewhat different from that of Spring quarter. The main reasons given involved (1) the cancellation or splitting of classes by the college, followed by (2) conflicts with work, other classes, or other duties, (3) grade-related reasons, and (4) decisions that those courses weren't needed.

Reflections

Once again it is obvious that the factors involved in the "withdrawal syndrome" are much more complicated than might at first be expected.

It may be easier to assume that "W" grades represent "dumb" students than to take the time to discover the reasons for low grades or for disappearing students. Can one really claim "misuse" of the "W" grade unless the college has decided what the proper use of it should be? If a student for whatever reason neglects to complete the official withdrawal process, should he (or she) automatically receive an "F", or does the instructor have options at that point? Is it reasonable for a student to fail a course by failing to withdraw? To what extent is Roane State willing to allow students to experiment and control their own educational progress? The whole issue of nonpunitive grading is one which must be confronted both at the individual and institutional levels, as it relates to a community college philosophy.

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